

PESACH SELECTIONS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Toward the beginning of Maggid, we find an incident involving five of the Sages recounted. Rabi Eliezer, Rabi Yehoshua, Rabi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabi Akiva and Rabi Tarfon were together in the city of B'nei B'rak, engaged in discussion about the Exodus. The discussion continued until their students came to inform them it was time to recite the morning K'rias Sh'ma.

One question about this incident concerns the reason they were interrupted by the students. The students came to tell them it was time to recite the morning Sh'ma. There are two ways of understanding this. The morning Sh'ma can only be said within a certain period. Were the students telling the Sages that the earliest time for reciting the Sh'ma has arrived, or were they alerting the Sages that their time to say the Sh'ma had almost elapsed? Many commentators explain the students were informing the Sages that the beginning of the time period for saying Sh'ma had arrived. According to this position, why did the students have to interrupt the Sages right away? There was still ample time for the Sages to say Sh'ma later!

Every Friday night, when singing the Shabbos songs, Rav Chaim Volozhin would skip the song Tzur MiShelo. The reason he gave for not singing this song was as its stanzas mirrored the blessings contained in the Grace After Meals, after singing the song, one would no longer be obligated to say the Grace After Meals. This was a problem, Rav Chaim said, because when our Sages have set forth a specific way to fulfill a commandment, we should do it that way, even if an alternative seems to fit the bill. Since there was a specific text set forth for the Grace After Meals, it is that text that should be used to fulfill the requirement of thanking G-d, and no other.

There is a commandment to remember our departure from Egypt every day. The Sages have told us this obligation is satisfied by our daily recitation of Sh'ma, which explicitly states the remembrance of the exodus. If the Sages in B'nei B'rak had continued their discussion after the time they were allowed to commence saying the morning Sh'ma, they would have discharged their obligation of remembering the exodus, albeit in a method not proscribed by the Sages. To assure that their teachers realized that they had to curtail their discussion so as not to perform the commandment of remembering the departure in other than the ordained fashion, the students let the Sages know that the time for Sh'ma arrived, and Sh'ma should be said before any discussion continued.

In the song of Dayenu, we thank G-d for giving us the money of the Egyptians. In the Torah (Shemos

11:2), we find that G-d ordered the Jews to go and ask the Egyptians for their gold and silver. The Netziv, Rav Naftali Berlin, explained that this instruction was purposely commanded to be a "borrowing." G-d had promised Avraham that when the nation would leave the land where they were to be strangers, they would leave with great wealth (Bereishis 15:14). G-d wanted the nation of Israel to have the riches of the Egyptian people. However, He did not want them to get overwhelmed by the valuables of which they suddenly became owners. He wanted to assure that the wealth would not cause them to become haughty. So, He commanded that they ask to borrow the gold and silver. Usually, people do not lend out their prized and most valuable possessions. They may lend valuable and precious goods, but not the most valuable and precious ones they possess. Because of this, when the nation asked the Egyptians to borrow the gold and silver, the Egyptians complied, but not with the finest of their possessions. In this way, the nation got the wealth, but not with the finery and valuables that might have caused haughtiness.

One year, a group of homeless men was sitting around in a shelter, discussing their lot in life and their plans. A few of them noted how as Passover was coming up and they were Jewish, they knew they would soon get a good meal. They were waiting for this feast eagerly. Another one of the men, who was not Jewish, began complaining how his friends were going to be out feasting, and he was stuck in the shelter alone, forced to subsist on what ever scraps were made available to him. The Jews in the group gave him an idea: Put on a Kippah, come with them to Shul on the Seder night, and they would make sure he would get a place to eat at as well. He didn't like this idea. He was not familiar with all the Jewish customs, he did not know Hebrew, and the hoax would be exposed without much effort. He wouldn't get a meal, and he would get humiliated. His friends came up with a plan.

On the Seder night, the group of men arrived at Shul, the non-Jew with them. The Jewish fellows in the group explained their friend unfortunately was physically unable to speak, and they asked for a home that could accommodate this special need. The person in charge of placing guests felt particularly bad for this man, and he asked one of the wealthiest and kindest members of the Shul if could take care of this man for the Seder. The individual happily acquiesced.

The non-Jew, Kippah on head, accompanied his host home from Shul. Before he left, his friends gave him one instruction: Just do whatever the host does, and you should not go wrong. Upon arriving in the house, the host took off his suit jacket and proceeded into the kitchen. He began to make preparations for the Seder. The indigent guest did as he had been instructed. He removed his jacket and followed his host into the kitchen. When he saw the host take large bowl of some grated substance, he went over to the bowl and watched carefully, making sure not to miss any detail. He saw his host remove some of this stuff and place it into a smaller receptacle. So he did the same. He soon realized that this stuff had a terrible smell, and it caused him to cry. But, if this is what his host did, he had to do it as well. After scooping out a few bowls, the host motioned for him to stop. The

host was a little confused, as no one needed so many bowls of Marror, but he ignored this incident.

When the homeless man entered the dining room, he beheld a magnificent sight: brilliant candles, sparkling silver, with fine china and crystal adorning the table. His mouth began watering; a feast fit for a king had to be forthcoming. Everyone was given a large silver goblet, which was filled to the rim with wine. He watched as the host said something, and soon everyone was seated, leaning on embroidered pillows, drinking the wine. He had never started a meal with wine before, but, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," he thought. He drank the wine and wondered what was next.

Soon, the hostess brought a large silver basin into the room, and everyone washed their hands. "OK," he thought, "this is how they prepare for the next course." He then saw his host's son bring a large plate of potatoes into the room. Again, this was a departure from what he was used to, but as long as he got his meal, he did not care. The host then began passing out tiny pieces of the potato, and everyone dipped the piece in some saltwater. The guest started getting a bit impatient. "Here I am, homeless and starving, and all I get is this tiny piece of potato!" He watched the host utter something, and everyone ate the potato. He figured the best was about to come.

He knew that things were not going as he had planned when the host took a matzo out, broke it, and then put it away instead of eating it. Then things only got worse. Everyone started reading aloud from a book and conversing! "Isn't everyone starving?" he thought. Fifteen minutes went by and still no food. Then a half an hour, an hour, and the wine in his empty stomach began acting with his hunger pangs. "My friends tricked me!" he thought. "Tonight is no joyous night. These people begin with a teaser of wine, eat tiny pieces, and start shmoozing without eating anything!" He started to get angry and frustrated.

However, the basin came out again, and his hopes began to rise. He was sorely disappointed to see that his host had begun to devour a large portion of Matzo, and a similar size was given to all around the table. All began eating the Matzo with a haste the poor guest could not understand. He began chomping like everyone else, getting more and more frustrated with each swallow. Next came that awful substance he dished out when he first arrived. "I can't believe we are going to eat this stuff!" he thought to himself. He began eating like everyone else. He began to cry, he turned red and broke a heavy sweat. "I am going to kill my friends when I get back tonight - if I ever survive," he muttered under his breath. His patience had been worn thin. He wanted real, solid, true blue food. Imagine his surprise when the host began to make matzo sandwiches with the bitter food he just ate. His utter disgust, combined with his slight intoxication, caused him to lose his cool. He stood up, threw down his Kippah and screamed "I've had enough of this. I can't take it any more!" And with that he ran out of the house.

Our life in exile is not an easy one. Sometimes, things seem good. The next thing we know, bad things, strange things, things that make no sense occur. We wonder if the exile is ever going to end. We wonder if there really is a G-d who loves us and watches out for us. We can't let the bad blind us

and cause us to become disenchanted and frustrated. If the poor man had just waited another five minutes, he would have been treated to a sumptuous feast like he had never seen. And, hopefully, we need wait only another five minutes until we experience the moment that we, with many before us, have waited for with eager anticipation.

L'Shana Ha'Baa'h B' Yerushalayim - Next Year in Jerusalem!

(Heard from Rabbi Yisroel Reisman - Agudas Yisroel of Madison, Brooklyn, NY.)